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THE  
PROGRESSIVE CHARACTER  
OF  
REVELATION

BY  
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## NOTE.

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THIS humble contribution to the increasingly absorbing study of Biblical questions is an effort to give some support to the teaching that correspondence between the divine mind and the human results normally from the relationship which the Creator holds to His universe; moreover, that all God-breathed communications have been in perfect keeping with human functions and human conditions. As a consequence, Revelation is, and has been, progressive.

The book is published in accordance with the request made by the Theological Union of Hamilton Methodist Conference, before which body selections were read during the session of 1899, St. Catharines.

HUGH S. DOUGALL.

Bright, Ont.,

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# THE PROGRESSIVE CHARACTER OF REVELATION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *DEFINITION OF TERMS.*

BEFORE we launch our little craft upon the restless sea of argument, two words in the title of our subject require some consideration. *Revelation* is a term more easily described than defined. It comprises truths now in possession of humanity resulting from the operation of the divine mind upon the human. It has been usual to confine revelation to those truths which relate to man as a moral and spiritual being. That the revelation concerning the redemptive purpose of God is the heart of the Bible, and the most glorious disclosure which ever broke upon the horizon of human consciousness, is a statement beyond controversy ; but to add that it is

the only disclosure is a supplement which we may find cause to question.

The word *progressive* is the one around which will circle the entire thought of this book. Not accidentally, but with full intention, will the term *evolution* be avoided. First, because respect is due the many noble and good men in whose minds is still lingering a strong but honest antipathy to the word; but more especially, in the second place, because of the difficulty in explaining it. As defined by many of its advocates, evolution is progress from lower to higher stages through forces resident in the thing progressing. Except protected by further explanation, to the uncritical mind, this view of evolution is in danger of becoming deistic—looking at the universe as something wound up, after which the Creator—if any Creator can be imported into the definition—retires from it, and without further interference observes it work out its own development. Or, if the word *forces* in the definition be interpreted as God in action, then there is the danger of plunging into another extreme—pantheism. The theory of evolution can, I believe, be expounded in utmost

consistency with Christian theism, but so much care is required that we will avoid the term.

The progressive view of revelation regards truth, not as springing full-grown into existence, as did Minerva from the head of Jupiter, but as being in its primal form germinal, often obscure and imbedded in some concrete institution or ceremony, but advancing stage to stage, each stage the natural sequence of its predecessor, until it exists in human possession full, distinct, and clear. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

This natural sequence, however, must in our thought of it never be disassociated from the immediate control and continuous direction of the Great Revelator. Nor must this progressive development be viewed as an unbroken, monotonous advance. Truth never comes to us in that manner. Rather is it acquired during conflict and readjustment—often a struggle between an extreme logical conclusion of one type, and an extreme of an opposing type, terminating in their final reconciliation. To discover progress in spiritual revelation at every point in all the past would be difficult. But take in the scope

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of one or five centuries and the advance becomes manifest. There have been points when reaction, or retrograde action, was taking place, but it really meant that some neglected truth had been left behind and was being reasserted; or some error was harvesting its crop of evil and thus demonstrating its true nature. So it may be asserted that he who peers backward into the ever thickening gloom of the past may discern the pathway of the Ancient of Days ever brightening until it bursts into the effulgence of Him who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person.

There are three great facts basic to our position which I hope so to expound as to secure your entire conviction of the truth of my thesis that revelation is progressive. After presenting these I shall conclude by giving some illustrations and inferences. The basic facts are:

1. The Relation of Revelation to its Author.
2. The Relation of Revelation to the Human Mind.
3. The Relation of Revelation to Historic Conditions.

## PART I.

### THE RELATION OF REVELATION TO ITS AUTHOR.

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#### CHAPTER II.

##### *THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD.*

"THE Bible is the representation committed to writing of God's historical revelation of Himself to the consciousness of man." This definition, given by an editor of the *Andover Review*, we will accept.

Looking at the Bible from its human side, it is the history of a people in their origin and development eventually culminating in the birth of one Person who becomes the beginning, and still remains the centre and soul, of a new body of people, bound together, not by national, but by religious ties. Yet, no one will contend that the Bible was written simply as the history of a

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nation. We believe it rather to be the record of a national life which was the vehicle of the continuous revelation of the divine mind in its will and nature ; that the divine mind found its best opportunity of manifesting itself through the life and historic conditions of this people ; that gleaming through it all, like a golden thread, is the out-shining of God's will, God's affection, and God's thought. The divine mind never disassociated itself from its medium—human nature. It always spoke to the human mind, for the human mind, and always in perfect keeping with the nature and need of the human mind. In short, since the divine mind has been operating continuously upon the human, and since the human mind can grasp truth only when proceeding from the simple to the more complex, from the easy to the more difficult, from the lower to the higher, revelation must have, in the very nature of things, a progressive history.

There are two views of the manner in which revelation is imparted that are in constant rivalry, and in their nature, utterly contradictory.

Their logical inferences are most diverse. Each is the product of a certain conception of the nature of inspiration, and in the last analysis each theory of inspiration is the outcome of an idea of the relation of God to the universe. These two theories are now before us.

The first view of revelation to which I shall advert is the *mechanical*. Revelation, according to this conception, is the Bible, a library of sixty-six books, communications from the Deity supernaturally imparted in a manner often independent of human consciousness and human reason. The reason of the person inspired was for the time being supplanted by the divine Spirit. He wrote in a sublime ecstasy, often perhaps unconscious of the purpose or purport of his writings. He was an amanuensis, a machine, as if he but held the pen while a divine, invisible hand grasped his wrist and guided his strokes. This theory involves as a logical sequence verbal inspiration. The very words, *ipsissima verba*, must also be given, for could it be possible for a writer to find words for ideas which he did not really possess, nor perhaps comprehend?

This theory of revelation and inspiration is the outcome of a view of the relation of the Deity to the universe termed the *Transcendence of God*. This is one of the most important conceptions in the history of Christian thought, for every phase of the theological teaching has been affected by it. It views the Deity as existing apart from His creation, not only exalted above the world, but separated from it by infinite degrees of space. It asserts that between the human and the divine mind there is no natural affiliation, and any communication must be utterly independent of human conditions—must be miraculously supernatural, or, in a real sense, be unnatural, *contra-natural*.

This is a bald statement of a fundamental, philosophic doctrine which entrals, consciously or unconsciously, the thinking of many people to-day. It reaches back to earliest years of Christian history, and for many years so dominated the whole sky of theological thought from horizon to horizon that not a single dogma or institution has come down to us without some marks of its formative impact. So important,

therefore, is this conception of the Infinite in relation to revelation, that we stop to look into its origin, history, and effects.

The cogitations of the human mind in its earliest recorded movements show tracings which bring divinity into closest touch with humanity; so close, indeed, that divinity was almost humanized. This primeval idea of Deity received its profoundest modification in the reaction of Buddhism. In the Buddhist mind the consciousness of inherent personal evil was so great, and the infinite holiness of God so supreme, as to create a dualism most complete and opposed—a dualism represented by Light and Darkness. God was a Spirit infinitely pure and infinitely remote. All material, all flesh, was infinitely impure. The gulf between could be bridged only by myriads of emanations, the first from the Infinite One, then each from its predecessor, each possessing less of divinity and more of humanity, until the lowest could communicate with men. The Indian fakir to-day as he lacerates, starves, degrades his poor body, indicates his belief in the utter sinfulness of everything

fleshly and material, and hopes by physical mortification to help his soul rise into somewhat closer reach of the far-away Divine One.

This Oriental dualism reached Greece in the days of its philosophic greatness. The religion of the ancient Grecian had rested on a pantheistic basis wherein God, man, and the universe were in such intimacy that they were hardly distinguishable. Plato was influenced by Buddhism when he pictured God as the passive Deity at an infinite distance in the heavens, unable to come into immediate contact with a world the very materials of which were tainted and conducive to evil. Created things at the best were but faint images of what existed in the pure thought of the Deity.

Aristotle, Plato's successor, recoiled somewhat from this extreme teaching, and prepared the way for the Stoic school, which appeared about 300 B.C. The Stoic philosophy swung backwards to the more primitive Grecian idea—concerning the Divinity as indwelling in the world, penetrating it everywhere and filling it with His presence.

So was originated these two great primal and rival conceptions of the relation of Divinity to the universe—one concerning Him as utterly external, the other as entirely indwelling. The struggle for pre-eminence has ever since continued, and, as we shall see, eventually divided the Christian Church into two great factions—one the Greek Church, which has maintained the teaching of the Stoics, and the other the Latin Church, which is still under the sway of Platonism.

These rival theories, with their resulting inferences and influences, met the early apostles of Christ. Gnosticism was but imported Buddhism, incipient Platonism. It taught the infinite remoteness of God, the impossibility of communication directly with men. So the infinite chain of emanations—archangels, angels, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers—was asserted. Christ was the *demi-urgos*, the last and lowest of these emanations. John, when residing in Ephesus, met this heresy, found it threatening to undermine faith in his Saviour, so he wrote the Gospel of St. John to combat it, therein asserting

the absolute and perfect Deity of Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Paul writes the letter to the Colossians, who had been tinctured by the Gnostic teaching of the Judaizers. He maintains that Christ "is before all things, and by Him all things exist" (Col. i. 17), that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9).

Strangely enough, the two great exponents and advocates of the externality or transcendence of God were Augustine and Calvin; the one who has done most to mould the Roman Church into the organic form and doctrinal creed it possesses to-day, the other a prime mover in the Reformation, which was and still is a protest against the Roman or Latin Church.

With both churchmen, the basis of their teaching is the deep consciousness of human sin and guilt, the utter depravity of human nature, as utterly unfitted as it is unworthy to be the channel or recipient of divine and spiritual communications. God exists apart from the world in the distant heavens, regulating human affairs from

outside through the agency of commissioned delegates. St. Augustine bridged the distance on one side of death with saints and the Virgin Mary, to whom the living pray, and on the other side by human orders, graded from pope down through cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and priests to the ordinary people. Here are traces of the gnostic heresy. The divine gifts were a miraculous deposit with the hierarchy, through whom only salvation could be obtained. Even the gift of the Holy Spirit was to be found only in the external rites of the sacraments, so these sacraments were made as many as possible in number. This dualism or severance between the divine and human underlies asceticism in all its forms, and creates and enforces distinctions between things sacred and secular, between days holy and common, between clergy and laity.

Since both Augustine and Calvin assert that there can be no natural and constitutional communication between the mind of God and the mind of man, revelation must be a miraculous gift, above human attainment. God has super-

naturally interjected ideas into human thought, has dictated them. Revelation must be accepted upon authority. Human reason is untrustworthy and dangerous, and cannot always be trusted in the interpretation of Scripture. So it came to pass that the Roman Church thought it best to withdraw the Bible from the laity. At length to read it all became a heresy and was often punished by death.

In this transcendent view of God's relationship to the universe, and the doctrine of revelation logically proceeding from it, there can be no assurance of gradual and progressive growth. Growth is a quality of things imperfect. Imperfection cannot be imputed to the Infinite One. Germinal truths, or truths developing naturally according to historic conditions and human mind and needs, are not necessary when God's method is to miraculously impart truth. Can He not use any man at any time in any way? Did He not once upon a time use an ass?

Few supporters of the inspiration of the Bible perhaps would care to rank as believers in the transcendent relationship of God; nevertheless,

those who pin their faith to any mechanical theory of inspiration should frankly recognize the transcendent theory as the true and logical progenitor of their inspirational creed. The Deists of the last century, who were full-fledged transcendentalists, logically and frankly denied anything supernatural in the formation of the Bible.

## CHAPTER III.

### *THE IMMANENCE OF GOD.*

THE second theory of revelation is that God speaks directly to the human consciousness in perfect conformity with the human faculties which He himself has implanted in the mind, and in accordance with human needs and historic conditions. This theory of inspiration might be termed the Naturalistic.

This theory is also an outcome of an idea of the relation of the Creator to the universe, known as the Immanence of God. This idea views creation as a projection of the divine nature, the concrete embodiment of principles which are the expression of Deity and in absolute harmony with Him, just as a great organ would be the embodiment and manifestation of the musical nature and principles of the master musician who creates it. The universe being such, God can and does dwell in it as light can dwell in

the eye; or, a better parallel, as life can dwell in the body which itself has formed.

Deity indwells and constitutes the essence and reality of all things. The universe is athrob with God. He dwells not afar, does not approach occasionally with abrupt interferences and interpositions, but directs the universe immediately and continuously as life pervades and controls the organism which embodies it. It is the breath of God which moves the tops of the mulberry trees in the evening quiet, or by Euroclydon lashes the ocean into tempest wild. It is the voice of God which at summer noon-tide is heard in the hum of bird and bee, resounds in the mighty organ-music of the forest when the tempest has drawn its stupendous diapason, or that angels hear when the morning stars sing together. It is the beauty of God which glistens in the pendant dewdrop, smiles radiant in the face of a lovely babe, or glorifies the western sky as the chariot of the Day King rolls onward. It is the power of God that draws the snowflake from the sky, and holds in its place every particle of the universe, from the tiniest atom which follows in the wake of a

meteor to the mightiest sun which forms the centre of a system. It is the life of God which awakes the bud in the spring-time, and moulds and develops the infinite variations of things vegetable, animal, and human. It is the love of God heard in the cry of the mother bird protecting the nestlings, in the lullaby-song of the mother crooning over a baby's crib, and in the tones of the patriot proclaiming that "it is sweet and good to die for one's country." It is the mind of God which has written mathematics in the heavens, in the arrangement of leaves upon the stem, in the molecules of a water-drop, and in the cranium of a boy. He it is who illuminates the thinking of the prophet, the poet, the artist, and the philosopher. They are all broken lights of Him.

Says Goethe in one of his shorter poems:—

" No ! such a God my worship may not win  
Who lets the world about his finger spin,  
A thing extern ; my God must rule within,  
And whom I own for Father, God, Creator,  
Hold nature in Himself,—Himself in nature ;  
And in His kindly arms embraced, the whole  
Doth live and move by His pervading soul."

Some one is saying "This is pantheism." By no means. The immanence of the Deity does not imply the rejection of divine transcendence. It is transcendent Deity indwelling His creation. He is infinitely greater than His creation, yet creation cannot exist apart from Himself. Nor does Deity dwell in nature slumbering unconsciously, gradually realizing Himself in nature's highest forms, but is Deity in the fulness of the infinite perfection of His incomparable attributes. The immanent Deity must not be spoken of as "it" but as "He."

To this conception of the relation of God to His universe the writer gives his allegiance, for by it the facts of human experience and human nature, spiritually, mentally, and physically, can be best harmonized. The idea is by no means new. It had its crudest inception, as we have noted, in the Stoic school of philosophers, but moreover was the theory accepted by the earliest Christian theologians attempting to give systematic expression to the Christian doctrines and support them upon an intellectual foundation. I refer to that school of eminent men enrolling such names as Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen,

and Athanasius, who flourished in Alexandria during the second and third centuries.

For centuries after, and even up to the present, the intellect of the world has been under the dominance of the Latin or Roman theology—a theology which has for its central and crucial doctrine the transcendence or absenteeism of the Deity. Upon this false idea Augustine and his successors reared the majestic and imposing structure of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and church—an idea which this ancient church is now forced to protect and support, despite the advancing tide of experience, conscience, and reason.

Strangely enough, or perhaps better said, naturally enough—for truth though crushed will rise again—after the lapse of centuries the human thought has boxed the compass and is again reaching that quarter of spiritual vision bearing the birth-mark and seal of the first school of Christian philosophy—a school so near to the historic Christ that the purity and fervency of his life was still an inspiration, so near to the earliest Christian brotherhood that the fire of pentecost was still effectual.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *REVELATION A NORMAL RESULT OF GOD'S IMMANENCE.*

THERE is no theological doctrine but is being vitally affected by the growing aversion to the old view of God's relationship to the universe,—that is, the doctrine of the divine transcendence,—by the increasing acceptance of the idea of the immanence of the Deity. Creation, the incarnation, miracle, prayer, regeneration, sanctification, the last things, and all other cardinal doctrines, are being exalted into a higher sphere, given a deeper, a more comprehensive and spiritual significance. And among those doctrines so vitally affected stands the one now interesting us, namely, Revelation.

According to the view which constitutes Deity as the mind and force of the universe, God is in organic relationship with human nature.

Between the human and the divine there is no infinite and unbridgeable gulf. God is not far from every one of us. Religion is an essential, primitive action of the human soul, an intuition which is due to the union of man with God and the universal order of things. God has always dwelt in the human soul, so created as to receive Him. He can speak to men because of this spiritual affiliation and the constitutional likeness of humanity to God's own image. Hence Revelation becomes part of an organic process,—a living, actual, ever-present process by which God has been revealing Himself to human understanding.

The mind of man has always been in necessary and continuous contact with an infinite Spirit, by whose inspiration alone he is led to know and receive the truth. The reason or consciousness is endowed with power to read what God imparts, and as Dr. Allen, of Cambridge, asserts, as it is vain and irrational to attempt to define the line where the human and divine have in Christ their most perfect union, and as is vain to draw the line between the human

reason acting for itself and the divine reason imparting a revelation, just as vain is it to deny the presence and action of the divine mind because it has human connections and meets with human limitations.

Such being the essential nature of revelation, looking at it from the divine side, it must have been *universal* and *continuous*. Never has the divine mind been sundered from the human. A light has always lighted every soul coming into the world. Never a region so secluded, a time so remote, but the essential principles of religion and morals have to some extent been in evidence. Dimly, doubtless, the light divine shone in the darkness of heathen temples and crudities of heathen philosophy, attempting to define itself in the minds of Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; yet the rays, which here and there penetrated dark clouds of ignorance and superstition, were broken though true rays radiating from the sun of infinite wisdom, goodness, power, and righteousness.

This view also secures the unity of revelation. The author is *one* and forever the *same*. And

since He changeth not, there has been no change in His purpose, no broken plan. He sees the end from the beginning. Every man in every epoch, though contributing to his own age and need, was, as the Deity intended, contributing to all men of after epochs.

Now the last words under this department must be said. If revelation has been universal, if continuous, if unified, if we know more of God now than did the first-born man, then it follows as light from the sun that revelation is progressive.

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## PART II.

### THE RELATION OF REVELATION TO THE HUMAN MIND.

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#### CHAPTER V.

##### *THE HUMAN MIND PATTERNED AFTER THE DIVINE.*

THE second argument for a progressive revelation is, that revelation is given to the human consciousness and through that consciousness; or, in other words, God reveals Himself to human thought in perfect keeping with the inherent nature of the human constitution. Since truth can be acquired by the normal exercise of our intellectual functions only progressively, from the smaller to the greater, from the concrete to the abstract, from the simple to the more involved, God working in the human mind conforms Himself to its nature, and therefore

reveals Himself progressively. Such is the argument to be expanded.

We need first clearly to discern that though all revelation is an impartation, yet it becomes a real, personal possession, received through mediums which God created for such service, and is miraculous only in the same sense that everything is miraculous which is the direct product of God's activity. Revelation is not arbitrary dictation received as Joseph Smith claimed to receive the book of Mormon.

As the children of God, our Father from the beginning intended to have communication with us. Revelation was not an after-thought which found humanity without the natural facilities for its reception. As children of God, not only are we to have heavenly communication, but we are the inheritors of such qualities as not only imply our sonship, but furnish capacities for intercourse with the Father. Those beautiful words, "made in his own image," tell us that our mental and spiritual organism has been patterned after the divine.

*I am self-conscious, I know myself as some*

one apart from everyone and everything else. I may not be sure of aught else in the universe, or whether beside myself there be a universe, yet one thing I know, "I am." To me this fact is first evidence of my divine relationship. In this I am like God. For this independent, separate, self-poised life is to be found in its absolute perfection only in God. I am—and I speak reverently—in this respect a miniature edition of the Almighty.

*Then, again, I have reason.* All reasoning is an effort to find truth, and since all truth is of God, all thinking is an effort to think over again the thoughts of God. And that to some extent I can do so is proof that my mind, however limited, is after the pattern of my Father's.

A lady holds in her hand an intricate piece of hand-wrought lace-work. Closely she examines it, following the pattern stitch by stitch, slowly, laboriously. At length she understands it. She has thought over again what was in the mind of the maker of that lace. The same connected course of thinking which passes through two minds proves a likeness of mental quality, if not

quantity. All human inquiry is an effort to retrace the thought of God in the intricate lace-work of this universe. For ages innumerable men have gazed at the stars, and so far as astronomy is correct to-day—and what has been learned is remarkable—it is but a tabulated record of how far the thoughts of the Infinite One engraven in the stars, have been read by man. We do not invent our mathematics. We find them in the orbits of the planets, in the angles of a crystal, in the arrangement of leaves upon a stem. Our multiplication table is as true for the Deity as it is for us. We find it constantly employed in every phase and form of creation. When some Agassiz, finding upon an island a strange bone, and from it reproduces a skeleton of the whole animal, he is attempting to reason backwards along the line of God's thoughts. When Tyndall, climbing the summit of the Matterhorn, reads on that rock-page all the geologic events of the ancient world, the mountain is dwarfed to an ant-hill, and becomes insignificant in the presence of him who can thus trace out the mind and work of God. Tyndall is what he

is because he is the son of the Maker of the mountain, and can think over again to an extent some of his Father's thoughts. His mind is the same in kind, though differing infinitely in degree.

*Men also have creative genius.* "As the Infinite One, passing through space, leaves behind those shining footsteps called suns and stars, glowing and sparkling upon planets innumerable, so man's mind, moving through life, leaves behind a pathway all shining with books, laws, liberties, institutions, and homes. As our planet, and the harvests that cover it, are the thoughts of God rushing into visible expression, so all houses and ships, all cities and institutions, are man's thought taking on outer and material embodiment." Here is another likeness of the human to the divine mind.

*In our freedom of will* there is a suggestion of omnipotence. One hesitates before saying so, but the human will can, and often sinfully does, antagonize and defeat the desires of the divine. Behold Jesus Christ standing on the hillside overlooking the Holy City. "Oh, Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children, but they would not." I would, but ye would not; I willed, but ye willed otherwise. Surely it is at this pinnacle of transcendent independence we most nearly attain to the firmament of God, and from which dizzy height, too, we may fall into the deepest pit of an abyssmal hell. Because we are sons of God, we, in our freedom in the exercise of our wills, are capable of becoming the sons of perdition.

*Then there is conscience*; that is, the still, small voice which from the inner solitudes of the soul speaks in all men fundamentally the same things about honesty, purity, justice and love. In some lives more and in others less, but in all the same intuitional voice speaks out in behalf of virtue and against vice. How explain this universal prompting to righteousness? In this way. Every man is born God's child, and, to some extent, God has transmitted to him some of the Father's characteristics.

If, then, as we are persuaded, men are in possession of mental, moral, and spiritual characteristics which are after the image of the

Father's, does it not become easy to believe that we possess avenues through which revelation may be received? Can we not grasp the possibility of the divine mind, to some extent at least, conveying truth to the human, and the human mind comprehending it?

Communication is only possible between minds alike in mental constitution, minds for which truth will be the same. Rudyard Kipling, in his "Jungle Stories," and the Philipinos in their poetry, make men to hold intercourse with beasts and birds. But this is possible only in fancy, for we do not attribute properties of rational conception and logical processes to animals lower in the order of creation than ourselves. Communication is possible only between those of similar mental constitution. And believing this to exist between the human and divine, the possibility and likelihood of communication asserts itself. And from this assurance it will follow, as a capital axiom in all true teaching concerning inspiration, that every revelation is part of the mental possession of the receiver, and is obtained in a manner perfectly harmonious

with the nature of his mind. Revelation is not truth dropped ready-made into our laps, and out of all relation to our ordinary way of obtaining truth. It consists of such a communion with the soul that the disclosure shall be in accordance with the full and proper action of all our mental powers.

The essential qualities of human thought, affection, and will are akin to the same functions in the Divine Father. In this we can conceive an intelligent means for communion and revelation. Indeed we must conceive communication between the human and the divine Spirit as more easy and direct than that between man and man. Between human souls there is a great gulf fixed. This gulf we bridge over by signs and words. We must telegraph to one another over the lines of the senses—through eye, or ear, or touch, feeling or smell. We send some signal to be translated often imperfectly by the mind at the other end. Human soul never mingles with human soul directly.

How different when we turn towards the Spirit of God. "It lies touching, as it were, the

soul of man, over, around and within," says Frederick Robertson. "On the outside of earth man stands with the boundless heaven above him, nothing between him and space—space around him, and above him, and enveloping him. So is the spirit of man to the Spirit of the Ever Near." They mingle. In every man this is true, however little conscious he may be. "God is not far from every one of us." Our souls are afloat in the immeasurable ocean of spirit. God lies all around us. At any time, if we did not prevent, we might be conscious of this contact. When we know it, we know God is speaking to us, and when we tell what He says to others, we become His prophets.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *WHY DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS ARE NOT FULL AND CONSTANT.*

BECAUSE of the essential identity in kind, though not in degree, existing between the human and the divine mind, revelation can take place. In our thinking God can mingle His thoughts; in our feeling He can instil His affections; our wills may be made stronger by His co-operation. The statement is to be made emphatic, that it is only in the exercise of our human and proper functions of mind that Divinity finds opportunity for inspiration.

Why is there not full and unbroken communion and communication? Why not perfect Revelation to every soul? For at least two reasons: First, because in the economy of His grace God bestows only when gifts are needed and can be employed; second, Deity is con-

ditioned by the mental development and spiritual purity of each receiver. Heaven speaks rarely to fools or to inveterate sinners. Of the first reason we shall have much to say in our next department. We can defer further remark until then.

Human ability to receive divine inspiration is measured by the mental capacity, knowledge, moral and spiritual fitness. The limitations are placed by the human factor. Every "good thing" which we receive is proportionate, not to the divine, but to the human element, and is conditioned by the human element, much as the water pure and unlimited in the great lakes feeding a Canadian city is conditioned by the size and cleanliness of the faucet in each home.

To the same extent, and only to that extent, in which there is purity of mind as well as likeness of mind, can there be communication. All men are identical in the essential mental faculties, but for any of us it is much more difficult to communicate with some persons than with others. Missionaries in China at first find it impossible to implant some ideas in the

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heathen mind. The Chinese have no words for these ideas, for the simple reason that the ideas are foreign to them. The Chinese mind must be elevated, educated, purified, brought more on a par with the mind of the missionary, before communication can take place. Or, taking a figure from the late invention of wireless telegraphy, the Chinese pole must be made higher before the spiritual messages can appeal to it. Because of the difference in experience and information, the word "ice" will convey no idea to an inhabitant of the torrid zone, or if it does, the idea will likely be grossly false. Talk of blueness to one who knows nothing about color; justice to one essentially unjust; space to one imprisoned within four walls from infancy, and you fail in your intention. Mendelssohn's concertos or Beethoven's sonatas would be altogether meaningless and harassing to an ear that finds its highest musical enjoyment in "Yankee Doodle."

The idea communicated must be adapted to the experience and intelligence of the mind to which it is communicated. The little child stands in the presence of its teacher. It is not

the knowledge of the teacher, but the degree of parity existing between the two minds, which measures the extent of the communication. The teacher must speak only of such things, and in such language, comprehensible by its small mind. We can conceive no other possibility of intercourse. These illustrations in a fair way indicate one reason why there has not been fulness and constancy of divine communications from all time and to all persons. Ignorance and sin have for the race, as they still do for many individuals, rendered the human mind incapable of more than a childish receptivity. What we now might know, had we always willed to do God's will, surpasses the most exalted imagination.

"But," queries some one, "could not God, who is all powerful, inject into the human mind ideas out of all relation to those it possessed before, and even out of all relation to the essential nature of the mind itself?" In all reverence the answer must be—"No." You can *imagine* Deity doing things, just as you can imagine a centaur, or you can imagine a witch riding a midnight storm on a broom, but your imagination would not be a *rational conception*. And here

is a nice distinction, which some not making are led into error. Whatever action we attribute to the Divine One must have harmonic relation with all known facts of His nature and of our own. Then, too, we must beware lest we over anthropomorphize Deity. With us what may be possible physically may be impossible morally. The good mother could physically strangle the babe on her bosom, but morally she could not. This human discrepancy or distinction must never be carried over and attributed to Him who is infinitely perfect. With Him whatever is not consistent with His nature could never be employed by His will as a method; and, as we shall see, arbitrary interjection of ideas into the human consciousness would be a contradiction of the Divine nature.

Every universal and necessary method of mind by which we obtain and hold in conscious possession a truth of any kind must be the method ordained by God, since He himself invested man with it. And to oppose this instituted nature of mind, to contradict it, would be, as anyone can see, to oppose and contradict Himself. You argue, certainly, for the possibility of a

miracle—that is the suspension of the ordinary laws, this being your idea of a miracle. Certainly you can imagine all this easily, but is it a rational possibility which in no way is a contradiction of your own highest thought of divine perfection? God can and does perform miracles, but it has yet to be shown that a miracle is the suspension or contradiction of invested laws. It is rather the employment of a law new to us or a new combination of old laws. A man seeing a balloon ascension for the first time might readily imagine it a miracle because seemingly a suspension of the law of gravitation, when it is simply a new effect produced by law as old as creation.

Now pray let it not be understood that in any words written there is anything but the fullest, gladdest confession, that "in old time holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Rather would the admission be made that the Holy Ghost has never ceased to speak to holy men. Such speaking is eminently comprehensible and to be expected. The contention is that the inspiring power operates in fullest harmony with our mental and spiritual nature.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE FINAL TEST OF TRUTH.*

THERE is another remarkable fact contributing to the certainty that if the human soul is to receive truth or a fact, the communication must be made to the immediate consciousness of the soul, and in harmony with its constituted functions. The Bible contains the highest and fullest voice of God which humanity has received or is capable of receiving. Had our needs demanded, or our capacities admitted more, that more would have been forthcoming. The Scriptures are the record of His word spoken to and in the deepest, noblest consciousness of man. That consciousness is not simply an inert medium through which Deity speaks; it is an active, spiritual faculty in knowing communion with God, and it tests the truth of those impressions, intentions, ideas, which come to it making

claim to divinity and truthfulness. This claim is sanctioned only when there is deepest and perfect harmony and accord with the moral and spiritual sense resident in the human nature. This perfect agreement is the foundation upon which rests all certitude of our religion, knowledge, and faith. That the final test of truth—truth for us, truth for the individual—lies in the human consciousness, is based upon the fact that men are the children of God, made in His image, and therefore possess an intellectual and spiritual constitution to which only such claimants for truthfulness as are divine can make successful appeal. The child has in him that which enables him to be spoken to by the father and by which he can hear the father's voice. Hence nothing can long retain acceptance as a divine revelation which does not appeal directly and successfully to the deepest fountains of human consciousness.

The final test of truth lies deep within each man's own soul. The Bible itself is not exempt from this law. It cannot be forced upon a man's intellectual and spiritual acceptance by external authority. Truth is not a matter of credence.

It must make appeal for sanction to a voice speaking deep within the sacred precincts of the human soul. No promise of reward or threat of punishment could induce the human mind to accept a book to the teaching of which the innate principles of the mind give a denial. Every book comes up to judgment before the bar of a man's soul. It must stand or fall, to him it will be true or false, according as it harmonizes with the intellectual and spiritual standards which, more or less perfect, are resident within himself. Nor can he force himself to act otherwise towards the book. His brain is not a motor-car which he can send forward, backward, or at an angle as he may wish, but a carriage which, if it moves, moves right on upon rails which, whether of gauge narrow or broad, are by himself immovable.

The Bible has received the consensus of human approval and become authoritative because men have intuitively and rationally recognized in it the highest, holiest, and fullest statements, symbols and teachings of truth and right and love. Each book in our holy library of sixty-six books

presenting itself as a claimant for canonicity had to come under this scrutiny of human investigation, and was admitted to the canon only when it satisfied the deepest intellectual, moral, and religious consciousness that the doctrines presented therein were true. No book came forward asserting its right to acceptance because of some overwhelming name behind it which had power to enforce its assertions. Such methods may do very well for some of the revelations in the Koran, or in the books of Mormon, but not for any book in our holy collection.

Many have been the claimants to biblical canonicity, but not all have been successful by any means. The Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Papias, and the now lost Epistle to the Hebrews, and others less important, failed to meet the requirements which the Christian mind had gradually incorporated. Seven other books now in the canon, viz., Epistles of James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Hebrews and the Apocalypse, were admitted only when a general assent had been obtained after years of discussion and thinking. And I need not inform

any reading person that even yet there are books of the Bible running the gauntlet of a hot criticism. It would be of interest to receive from biblical champions, who do not assent to the statement that the final test of truth lies within the human soul, an answer to these questions: To what arsenal do they resort for their weapons of defence? What are the arguments which they believe are final, to which there is no rebuttal? Are they not all found in a depository lying deep within their own natures?

To be sure the Divine Mind has ever presided over the formation of our Testament canons, a presidency made possible because of the innate likeness of the human to the divine mind, a presidency made possible only on the same grounds that revelation itself is possible.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### *SELECTION OF MATERIAL FOR A PURPOSE.*

IN further evidence that in revelation there is never the suppression or subversion of the free action of our mental and spiritual faculties, but rather always the co-operation of the divine with the human to the extent of the willingness and fitness of the inspired person, let us turn to the Bible itself. It will be through no lack of reverence, nor should irreverence be imputed to us, if we subject the Holy Text to the same rigid literary analysis which we never hesitate to apply to other books. Everywhere we will find the presence and activity of the human element. The rationalist claims he can discover no other elements, but we who are the defenders of an inspired literature need not deceive ourselves in thinking we strengthen our cause by imitating our opponents in deliberate blindness to one of the factors in the production of the Scriptures.

Note some of the literary methods and characteristics discernible in the various books. It is certainly a method peculiarly human which an author employs, when, before writing, he takes notes, gathers fresh material, collects the writings of other men about him, and then selects this, rejects that, in keeping with his purpose.

Driver asserts that the Hebrew historian, as we know him, is essentially a compiler or arranger of pre-existing documents. He is not himself an original investigator. No entire book of biblical history, excepting, perhaps, the shortest, as Ruth and Esther, consists of a single original work. Older writings or sources of information have been combined in such a manner that the points of juncture are often plainly discernible and the sources capable of being separated from each other. Few authors rewrite their material in their own language; they cut from the sources at their disposal such extracts as are suitable for their purpose, incorporate them in their works, making only such changes as are made necessary by the plan.

Such is the opinion of many students concerning the authorship of the first five or six books of the Bible. They claim that these books are a compilation of two or three much older documents, each with definite literary marks and a varied religious purpose. From these various documents extracts are made. At times they relate to the same subject, as in the two distinct histories of creation in the first and second chapters of Genesis, and the two versions of the decalogue as seen in Exodus xx. and in Deut. v. Another element is the linking matter supplied by the compiler himself, uniting in one continuous account the excerpts from the older MSS.

It should, in fairness to the more common view of the Mosaic authorship of these early books, be said that the teachings of Professor Sayce, and the recent discovery of many ancient tablets, establish the certainty of there being an ancient Egyptian literature, and, if so, making it possible for Moses to be his own biographer, and the inspired historian of previous history. This will rob the somewhat extreme theory of the higher critics concerning the authorship of the Hexateuch of part of its force.

But be this as it may concerning the Hexateuch, it is certain that the books of Judges, Kings, Samuel, and perhaps Chronicles, were constructed from pre-existent sources. Some of these sources are openly avowed, such as the book of the Acts of Solomon, book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel, and of the kings of Judah—government records evidently—the book of Joshua, the book of Iddo the Seer, the book of Gad, and the book of Nathan. Still others might be mentioned.

In Luke we have a confessed follower of the method of selection for a purpose. Declaring himself to "have perfect understanding of all things from the first," and having personal intercourse with those "who from the beginning had been eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word," he gathered material as other historians gather material, and then sat down to write "in order" a history of the life of Christ and the inception of the Christian Church. Bernard declares there is not a book on earth in which the principle of intentional selection is more evident than in the Acts of the Apostles.

It is not to be supposed that Luke was unacquainted with the doings of James or John, or that he recorded all he knew when some speech is by him but lightly touched. His purpose was to give a true idea of the infant Christian Church as it was emerging from the shadow of Judaism, and he selected his material accordingly.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *LITERARY FORMS AND MECHANICAL STRUCTURES.*

ONE of the most remarkable works in the entire divine collection is Job. Nowhere is mechanical plan, as well as literary genius, more strikingly apparent. One can almost imagine that a "skeleton" had been constructed by the author before he began his real work. The book is in reality a thesis undertaking to disprove the ancient theory of divine providence—that suffering is always heaven's judgment upon sin, and prosperity the reward of righteousness.

It was contrary to the literary genius of the Hebrew to write an argument in the abstract. He must embody the spirit of his thought in some concrete and realistic expression. So the author of Job chose for his book the form of a drama, just as many modern writers, having a

lesson to teach, choose the form of a novel. An old legend, or an actual bit of patriarchal history handed down by the Arab tribes and imported into Palestine, was made the distaff from which to spin his drama, the peg upon which to hang his argument. This story is simply but graphically told in prose in an introductory paragraph. But when the author reaches the point where the development of his argument begins, he abandons prose and ascends into poetry. Three men, differing in temperament and mental ability, and chosen as representatives and defenders of the three prevailing types of thought, came forward in defence of the ancient theory of God's providence. Job is made to do duty as the advanced thinker no longer content with the old teachings. An order of speaking most conventional is employed. Job's opponents speak three times around, in the same order each time, Job replying to each speech. The effort throughout the cycles of debate is to effect a reconciliation between the old idea of retribution and the fact of a righteous man in suffering in such a way as to leave confidence in

the justice of Jehovah unshaken. The attempt fails signally. Then Jehovah, riding in the storm-chariot and speaking from the whirlwind, without explaining the *modus operandi* of His providence, so raises their whole nature into closer communion with Himself, producing such unquestioning faith that confidence in His justice is restored. Faith, not knowledge, is the key to the enigma of spiritual repose. In what writing can the human element be found more in evidence? A writer suffused with God's inspired truth elaborates a scheme so eminently human that the greatest literary savants of to-day are amazed at its magnificent fitness.

*The Song of Songs* is unique in being a love-song, fervid, imaginative, emotional. It has no easily apparent religious aim. Its purpose is a question about which doctors differ. Though lyrical in its thought, the song in form, when taken as a whole (Ewald, Delitzch, Driver), is a drama of five or six acts, with a rudimentary plot, and with dialogue, action, and characters consistently sustained. Driver suggests that since the song when read is so difficult of

comprehension, that it would seem to have been originally designed to be acted, the different parts being personated by different characters, though even the varied gesture and voice of a single reciter might be sufficient to enable a sympathetic circle of hearers to apprehend its running purport.

*Lamentations* possesses a form of structure most mechanical and slavish. The book consists of five independent poems, constructed upon a most artificial plan, and though differing somewhat in detail, yet all are most manifestly formed after one pattern. The Hebrew alphabet, in which there are twenty-two letters, is the basis of the scheme. Each poem contains twenty-two verses, or some multiple of twenty-two. The first four poems are acrostics, each verse beginning with a Hebrew letter, taken in its order. In the first and second poems each verse consists of three members or sentences. Only the first word in the first sentence begins with the Hebrew letter. In the third poem, the verses consist of single members, but three verses, each having the same initial letter, are assigned to each letter

alphabetically taken, so that this poem has in all sixty-six verses. The fourth poem is similar in structure to the first and second, except that each verse has two members only. The fifth poem is not alphabetical, but consists, nevertheless, of twenty-two verses, each consisting of two somewhat short members.

A reference to the text of the revised edition of the Bible will make this compacted description more clear. There an effort has been made to show, as well as a translator can, the mechanical arrangement of the original Hebrew text.

## CHAPTER X.

### *DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.*

IF our view of inspiration be the true one—God speaking to the human consciousness—we will find, upon examination, that the inspired person, when committing the revealed truth to writing, will disclose his own temperament and give evidence of his training and environment. The truth will be of God; but the manner of recording it, and conveying it, will be the recorder's own. The style and manner of expression will be after the writer's personality.

Omitting the historical sections of the Old Testament, for reasons apparent to us, we may with safety assert that there breathes through each of the remaining books of the Bible a spirit revealing the tone of mind, the spiritual development, the ethical conceptions of its author. The

hopeful soul of Isaiah, seeing in clear prophetic vision the coming of Jehovah's servant, exulting in the certain re-establishment of the covenant people and the overthrow of their enemies, speaks forth in words and sentences majestic and musical, in thoughts inspiring and sublime. While discouraged, broken-hearted, Jeremiah, brave soul though he was, blots every page of his Lamentations with tear-drops of sadness and despondency.

Amos, the shepherd of Tekoa, wrapped in his sheepskin jacket, comes from the pastures to Jerusalem, under the impetus of a spiritual call. To one whose daily fare was a bit of bread and a few figs or olives, whose homely garments were made from the flocks that were his care, whose home was a cot most humble, the wealth and display exhibited by the voluptuous, enervated nobles was to him the source of Israel's degradation. It drew from the shepherd his fiery denunciations. Living in constant communion with Jehovah under the open sky, or meeting with the villagers in the simple ritual of the synagogue, his unclouded sight penetrated

the form of godliness, and in terms most vigorous, and with symbols and metaphors drawn from sky and field, proclaims the day of coming vengeance, and admonishes to reform. His burning indignation, his ardent desire play like lambent fire over his written words.

The writer of Ecclesiastes expresses himself like one who had made shipwreck of life, or was living at a time of hopeless political servitude and national deterioration. No bright light to the dark clouds which shadow his fretful mind. Man's labor, he complains, achieves nothing permanent. Pursuit of wisdom is disappointing, nor is the effort to attain riches more satisfactory, for none can tell who will inherit them. Injustice had usurped the place of righteousness, and even the future life held out little hope of redress, for man hath no pre-eminence over the beast—all go to the one place. Women, moreover, are one of the chief foes to human happiness; and thus this minor cadence wails through the whole book. Surely unhappiness almost to despair must have possessed the author as he wrote.

Turning to the New Testament, we find the personal characters of the various writers, their peculiarities of mind and temperament, not only modifying their modes of expression, but strikingly moulding their conceptions of Christian truth. Each received Christ for himself, but after a manner peculiar to himself. Mention John, Peter, and Paul, and immediately three distinct types of teachers and teachings suggest themselves. There is a personal aroma about each as distinct from the others as the spicy perfume of the aromatic carnation is distinct from the heavy fragrance of the Easter lily.

John is the apostle of love and light. The writers of the first three Gospel histories are honest but simple-minded men, who could see, hear and report historic facts; but the far-reaching meanings, the mystical, spiritual inferences were beyond them. So their writings are narrations of externalities—the doings and sayings of Jesus. But John was a seer—a prophet of a higher type. He who lay upon Jesus' bosom so that hand touched hand, and eye sought eye, was possessed of a spiritual intuition, a fine

flame of divine penetration, by which he could pass, not by logical processes alone, from the deed to the life behind, from the word to the underlying spirit. The authors of the Synoptics were historians, Paul was a philosopher, but John was the poet who perceived the invisible, heard the inaudible, touched the intangible, whose soul could behold the vision apocalyptic and splendid, grasp the meaning of love and truth in their far-reaching, all-enclosing circles. He it is therefore who teaches the divine immanence, enters into the deep mystery of the incarnation and spiritual sonship of Jesus, understands the meaning of regeneration and sanctification of the human by the incoming and indwelling of the divine. He alone records that last long conversation of Christ with His apostles, and the prayer for the future Church, because he alone, to any extent, comprehended their spiritual significance and prophetic import.

Paul, we have said, was the philosopher rather than the poet. He attained to spiritual vision, but by processes intellectual rather than intuitional. He was to be the organizer of the

Christian Church, and was chosen because of his eminent fitness for this appointed work. In himself Paul is a sufficient demonstration that an inspired author is a person penetrated by the truth of God, and that the personality is never elided, but is worked upon by the divine spirit in fullest consonance with itself.

The personal, the subjective, the human, so pervade the Pauline writings that if we were to destroy these elements, the remnant would be small indeed and often beyond interpretation. Paul's training in Jewish dialectics stands revealed in the systematic statement of the Christian faith to the Romans. His literary culture makes him a *persona grata* to many Athenians, as he tactfully, in polished address, refers to their philosophy, religion, and poetry. The perfect *abandon*, the entirety and continuity of his allegiance to the cause he espoused, are not more apparent in Saul the young man, who held the garments of the proto-martyr Stephen, and pursued with threat and slaughter the fleeing Christians, than in Paul the apostle, from the hour he was introduced by

Barnabas to the Christian council, to the hour when, having finished his course, he laid his head upon the block a willing tribute to Christ.

As a converted Pharisee, long unsuccessful in obtaining spiritual peace and rest by obedience to numerous mandates of law and tradition, he obtained his attachment to the doctrine of justification by faith, and his inveterate antagonism to teachings of Judiastic legalism, by his experience of immediate pardon. His meeting with the spiritual Christ explains the mysticism of his views in such statements as—"life hid with Christ in God;" "Christ in me the hope of glory;" "in whom we live and move and have our being." To the same incident must be attributed his idea of the resurrection being a fundamental argument in Christian evidences.

The heart-throb of Paul <sup>is</sup> felt warm and vigorous in all his epistles. The man lives in every one of them. There is no cold objectivity and abstraction from which the author disappears. Rather may be found the ebullitions of personal passion as he lashes the weakness and errors of his readers without pity, or couches the

sharp lance of irony and satire against the enemies of the infant churches. But the wrathful mood melts into tender pity and love, and the most touching expressions of heartfelt interest appear, as with ardent longing he identifies himself with the struggles and hopes of his spiritual children.

The spirit of Paul in his epistles is one of companionship rather than of dictation. He does not speak as an oracle announcing a succession of revelations in which he had no part, and to be accepted without comment or question. His teachings are so much his own that he gives them the noticeable title of "my gospel," and clearly the workings of his own mind are disclosed as he endeavors to carry truth to the minds of others. "He utters his own convictions, he pours forth his own experience, he confutes by argument rather than by authority, deduces his conclusions by processes of reasoning, and establishes his points by interpretations and applications of former Scriptures." ("Progressive Orthodoxy," p. 158).

How splendidly human is all this! How

certain it is that this man, than whom no greater prophet ever existed, had grasped the divinely inspired truths with his deepest personal consciousness, and after a manner in absolute keeping with his mental and spiritual nature; indeed, with truth may it be said, that the Spirit adapted itself to his eccentricities, and that in the same manner he received the truth so he endeavored to impart it

So splendidly human is it all that it requires no over-fanciful imagination to enter into the particular frame of mind possessing Paul as he sat down to indite a letter to this church or that person.

The letter to the Romans is from a stranger to strangers. With the exception of some salutations at the end, there is no note of personal acquaintance. It is an orderly statement and exposition of his teachings and their applicability to the Gentile people whom he proposes to visit.

The letters to the Corinthians carry a distinct tone of anxiety. Bad news has reached Paul, and from a distance he endeavors to correct

wrong interpretation, prevent disputation, and invoke avoidance of temptation. Galatians is almost angry in its spirit as Paul attacks the Judaizers, defends his apostolic authority, and rebukes fickleness. Colossians is combative—Paul assails the incipient Gnostic heresy—while Philippians is radiant with warm fellowship and good feeling. So thoroughly is each letter a child of Paul's own heart and mind that every one could be traced to its parentage by its characteristic features.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE HUMAN ELEMENT DOES NOT MAKE REVELATION LESS DIVINE.*

"IN saying that the apostolic teaching is the expression of the spiritual life of its authors and wears the impress of their respective personalities we do not take one jot or tittle from its sacredness as a revelation. . . . If it should please God to produce a book of oracles by sheer and stark miracle, or to dictate the contents of one to a scribe or number of scribes, the teaching would not come more directly from Him than when a soul in vital contact with Him freely utters under the leading of His Spirit, the truth which is the element in which it lives. In the latter case He controls and shapes the teachings. Whatever of man is in it, it is there as his medium of impression. If it is given when the man in whom it dwells pleases, it is

when God pleases, too, for the will of the organ of revelation is gladly responsive to God's life."

—*Andover Review.*

I have not stopped to support my position by lengthy reference to what I believe would be one of its best witnesses—the manner of our Lord's teaching. In Him we have God revealing Himself through human life without the disuse of human quality of heart or mind. Christ Himself is the assurance that God can reveal Himself through human mediums, for there is no divineness in Christ's words which is not expressed in forms and words most splendidly human. The unity of spirits human and divine which existed in Christ proves the possibility of the Spirit of God so abiding in a man that that man may become, not simply a vessel containing God, or a vehicle conveying Him to others, but it demonstrates an intimacy of communion in which the two natures can so touch, so assimilate, that there will be the transference of thought, feeling, desire, determination from the divine to the human. The incarnation of Christ is the fullest

and highest evidence of the certainty and possibility of revelation.

Before His departure Jesus promised that His Spirit should "lead" the disciples into all truth. Was that leading not inspiration? and the truth learned, was it not revelation? Is the word "lead" not suggestive of human processes? And do we not *know* it to have been progressive? Is the manner in which the Spirit of God works to-day and has always worked in conveying truth to men, leading them up to a higher order of truth and fuller comprehension of Himself, not identical with the methods of Christ when He "led" into truth the two disciples on the way to Emmaus? He began where they were, began far enough back for them to grasp the early, primal principles of Revelation concerning Himself, and then advanced step by step in keeping with their ability to comprehend. His mind and theirs travelled side by side. He suited his methods and matter to their comprehension and need. So it is ever in divine teaching—the human element is the channel; the human need, the reason; the human receptivity, the occasion or opportunity.

One more little point under this department. Christians pray to-day for spiritual guidance and teaching. This really is a request for inspiration and revelation. Who of us has ever been conscious of spiritual teaching or spiritual gifts accompanied by the abrogation of consciousness, or the annulment for the time of our normal faculties. A conscious truth received through unconsciousness is nonsense. And if we, and at present, are not so led of God, why any one or ever? Why weave about our beloved Book a web of imaginary features which contribute in no way to its divinity, authority, or sacredness, but add only to our burden of difficulties, of which surely we have sufficient?

We conclude, then, that God spoke to all prophets in the past in essentially the same manner in which He speaks to all prophets in the present—in perfect keeping with our constitutional nature. And since, according to this nature with which He himself invested us, we can grasp truth only by proceeding from the lower to the higher, from the related to the unrelated, from the simple to the complex, **revelation is progressive.**

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## PART III. HISTORIC CONDITIONS OF REVELATION.

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### CHAPTER XII.

#### *REVELATION PRIMARILY ADAPTED TO ITS AGE.*

EXAMINATION of the Bible must give evidence of another fact before credence can be given to the doctrine we are investigating—The Progressive Character of revelation. It must be found that Revelation has adapted itself in every age to the religious and moral capacity of that age; that the advancement and conditions of the age made both room and demand for the revelation—room resulting from previous spiritual growth, and demand arising out of peculiar, present exigencies. It must be found that each new divine *word* reflects the local historical influences at the time when it is given, that it is a subject of interest

and enquiry to the prophet or apostle receiving it, and is recognized as having some bearing upon contemporary moral and religious needs of the people or persons to whom given.

It does not follow, nor indeed would it be rational to expect, that any divine *word* would exhaust itself, be limited in its meaning to the age and need of the people to whom it is given. Rather the new truth is a fuller interpretation of a higher light upon some accepted view, an interpretation and light made possible by moral and spiritual progress, and called forth by existing circumstances or conditions. The new phase of an old truth may be one in a developing series, and in turn become the germ out of which deeper meanings develop as new circumstances and new needs rise. All this will be found if God speaks to men through their own consciousness, and in keeping with their needs. If so found, then revelation will be progressive in its character.

I have a feeling that some good and honest Christians, who would gladly hold a brief for God's honor as an infinite power, and who would

be a little shocked perhaps if anyone said "No" to the child's query, "Can God do everything?" may be indignant because of this assault upon theological trenches which they have so long and so valiantly defended. I respect their feelings, and give them personal reverence, for they have been our fathers in the Gospel, and the tenets which they so vigorously support are among the standards around which our ancestral defenders of the faith fought and bled. But men are as honest, as earnest to-day as ever men were, and they are thinking as never men thought before, thinking with a fearlessness which springs from faith unparalleled. They believe they are children of the divine Father, with minds therefore capable of recognizing truth and of being directed in their search for it. They believe that every good and perfect thing has come down from the Father of lights, and that the universe lives, moves, and has its being in Him. Believing this, they seek the beautiful circle, luminous in its own truth, running through all, and in a sense making man and things one with God. They dare enter any

precinct however guarded, investigate any book or institution however sacred, pursue devotedly any path leading to truth, even though some loved abodes must be abandoned, and adored idols be dropped by the way.

To these fearless but reverent students the theory of a mechanical revelation is as abhorrent as the doctrine of a special providence is abhorrent. For faith in an absentee Deity who occasionally and arbitrarily interferes, and in a special fatherhood only sometimes fully supporting and directing, is as dishonoring to God as it is insulting to men who claim to be His children.

The subject of the relation of revelation to historic conditions is not one which belongs to the realm of *a priori* reasoning, but to the realm of facts. It is a matter of investigation and evidence. The Bible is ours as a possession; let us open it in a spirit most reverent.

Two things may be declared at the outset. We shall not find in the Bible a single claim supporting the mechanical theory of revelation or inconsistent with historic conditions; and, second,

never will a case of arbitrary, or unhistoric, revelation be substantially discovered. Every single instance of a new truth, not lying so far back in the gloom of distant centuries that nothing can be predicated about it, will be in keeping with historic conditions.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE BOOK OF JOB, THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN, AS ILLUSTRATING THE HISTORIC DEMAND.*

WHY is it that the Biblical student of to-day, before he enters upon a critical and careful study of the spiritual teachings of a book, asks such questions as, Who wrote it? To whom was it written? when? and why? Because he believes that the book was written under definite conditions, for a specific local purpose, and that he cannot interpret it, cannot read into it the thoughts of its author, except he transports himself back to the time and place, looks out upon the scene from the author's view-point, enters into his temperament and is stirred by the impulse of his motive.

Take for example that surpassingly interesting book, to which lengthy reference has already been made, the Book of Job. It was formerly

the habit of Biblical teachers to refer the authorship of this book to a patriarchal date, make it a biography of Job, written perhaps by his contemporary, Moses. But this view makes trouble for the student now. The book becomes difficult to understand, its meaning obscure, chiefly because under such a view no purpose can be assigned. Why should the retributive government of Jehovah be questioned at that early age? Indeed we know that at that time it was one of the most prominent of unquestioned doctrines. How, too, shall we account for the Grecian mode of philosophic thought, the classical and literary form, the presence of Aramaic words, the developed Hebrew, the reference to kings and princes and priests, a disturbed political condition and a debased morality? We cannot account for these things according to the old view, but the problem resolves itself, light floods the gloom, when the date is placed during the Babylonian exile. Now we can read the book by the aid which its true historic conditions bring us. We can understand why the old doctrine that only the unrighteous suffer should be

questioned when so many righteous men conscious of their integrity were in suffering? The purpose of the drama discloses itself—God would reconcile men to His providence, not by reasons appealing only to the intellect, but by such a manifestation of His wisdom and power as would raise their whole spiritual nature into closer communion with Himself; then, flushed with a sense of God, man believes, though he cannot explain. The lesson of Job is one of trust, of simple, unquestioning faith. How divinely opportune would that teaching be to the broken-hearted exiles whose harps were hanging on the willows by the rivers of Babylon!

Four accounts of the Christ-life have been left us. Why four? If the mechanical idea of revelation be true, that the Spirit speaks independently of the character and consciousness of the inspired person, and of the historic conditions in which he lived, is it not natural to conceive that God, who is perfect, would have given us one history of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, so divinely complete and absolutely correct that nothing more could be wanted for the

fullest presentation of the Saviour! But we possess four records of the Christ-life, and all are needed. Four men viewed this life, and each saw only that aspect of it which appealed to himself, recorded it for a particular purpose, and after a manner peculiar to himself. In a lithographer's shop, upon one stone you see one aspect and one coloring of a scene, and another aspect and another coloring upon each of three or four other stones, but the impress of all must be put on the same paper before a true and finished picture is secured. So with the four histories of Christ. Matthew writes for his own people and presents Jesus as the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy. Mark's book is a simple pen-picture for the Gentiles, showing Jesus as He went about doing good, emphasizing particularly His miracles. Luke is the most elaborate and ambitious of the Synoptists. As a disciple of Paul, he supports the missionary cause by a Gospel exhibiting a gratuitous and universal salvation. Each of these three writers manifestly selected the material which best suited his purpose.

But consider the Gospel of St. John, around which the roar of controversy and the battle of the critics still resound. In it most strikingly is found the relation of revelation to the conditions of time and place.

The first three Gospels are simple records of a Person and facts concerning Him. It was inevitable that as Christianity spread and became prominent, this Person would become the subject of profound and subtle controversy. It was natural that men seeking intellectual certitude, or prompted by antipathy, would undertake rigid investigation. The first great Christian controversy turned, therefore, about the person of Christ. This could not arise until time had passed. The year one hundred had almost arrived before the Gnostic heresy denying the full Deity of Christ made the first attack upon the Christian faith. Christian defences must be forthcoming. The voice of one must speak that shall resound with authority and certainty, carrying certitude into the future Church. It must be the voice of one whose eyes had seen, whose ears had heard, whose

hands had touched the word of life. Yet also one in whom were the deepest spiritual intuitions and conceptions, ripened by much thought and long experience. For this purpose God had preserved the disciple who first came to Jesus, who followed Him continually, who lay upon His bosom, who stood by His cross, who believed when others were confounded, whose keen spiritual vision beheld more fully the glory which belonged to his Lord. So John the beloved wrote the first great Christian apologetic, upholding and evidencing from Christ's own words the central truth of Christian dogmatics—Jesus and the Father are one.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *JESUS CAME IN THE "FULNESS OF TIME."*

IN further support of the contention that revelation is alway true to historic conditions, it would be interesting to note how each new step, each new religious idea in the history of the young Christian Church, as recorded in the Acts, resulted from a new emergency calling forth a new decision or action. Each epistle also was written to meet some specific demand. But passing all this we will have gathered sufficient evidence when we observe that Jesus, the Reve-lator and the Revelation Himself, came to earth in fullest harmony with historic conditions, and that during His earthly career His teachings were given as the occasions prompting them arose.

In reminding you of the preparation in history for the coming of Christ, it will be necessary by a few words only to indicate those

moulding forces, controlling influences, lines of operation ever reaching toward "one far-off divine event," which culminated in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago. Then came the "fulness of time," the focal point in the history of the ages, and then, and therefore, came Jesus.

Most carefully must we guard our statements lest it be thought that Jesus Himself was but the product of developing forces, the culmination of historic tendencies, and Christianity but the flower of Judaism tempered with Grecian and Oriental philosophy. Not so. Nothing in previous history could account for Jesus or evolve His personality. He stands "supreme, solitary, unique, transcending all analogies of experience, all limitations of nationality or generation, determined before the world was, beyond the power of any antecedents to produce the entry of such a new thing into the world" (*Lux Mundi*.) Yet, on the other hand, He appears at a point of time, at a certain conjunction of historic conditions, giving splendid evidence of His compliance with human conditions by coming at a time best suited to Himself and His work.

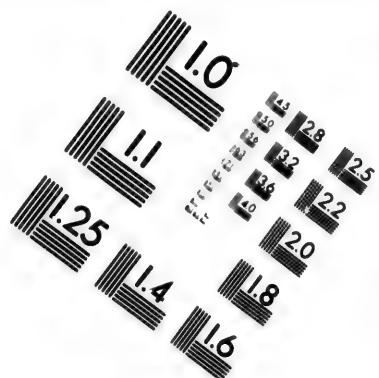
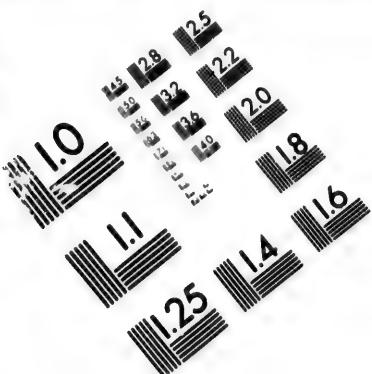
Every student of Biblical history has traced through the centuries the schooling of the chosen people by separation and chastisement, by types, ceremonies, and lips of prophets, until they were in possession of the purest existent ethical and religious conceptions, until Palestine became fitted to be the birth-place, and the Hebrews the birth-people, of the Saviour of the human race.

Then, too, we observe the preparation for the coming of Christ in the shaping of the world-history toward the Christian era. Had Jesus come one hundred years earlier, He would have found himself among unconsolidated political *debris*, when the west and north was unsubdued barbarism, when pirates disturbed the seas, and the Syrian and Macedonian wars filled the world with strife. Had He come one hundred years later, he would have found rival emperors in fierce contention, and the march of the Goths and Vandals presaging the end of the Roman Empire. But coming when He did, the world was singularly homogeneous, and when law and order united it into one majestic whole. North,

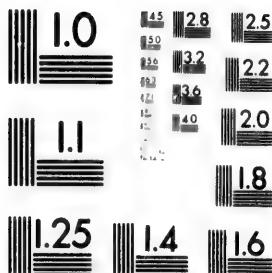
east, south, and west had the great Roman roads been constructed and thrown open to the missionaries of the cross.

At that time, too, there sprang up with the empire the idea of a great world-religion, as there was a great world-empire. Every little nation had possessed its own peculiar creeds and its array of gods, which it guarded as assiduously against change as it did its political boundaries against invasion. But the change of religious spirit incident to the sweeping away of national barriers, and to the blending of the isolated peoples into a consolidated empire, prepared the way, and at length created the demand, for a universal religion. This was indicated by the collection of all the varied national gods into one pantheon, and by the deification of the emperors.

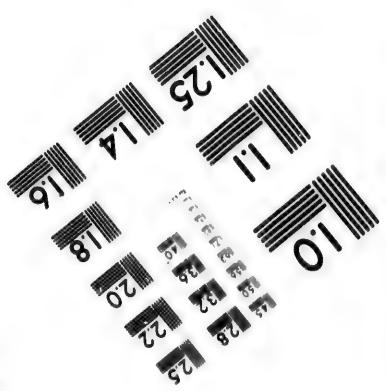
Greece, much more than Rome, prepared the world for Christ. It may be said that, unwittingly to themselves, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were forerunners of Christ, preparing the way as truly as was John the Baptist. They made the first great inroads upon the provinces



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of intellectual truth, and created the first great hunger for the conquest of these provinces. With the decline of their nation's greatness, the Greeks turned their thoughts to finding their happiness within their own bosoms by a frame of mind, a view of world-government, which, despite all external contingencies or conditions, would give rest to the mind and contentment to the heart. So, three centuries before Christ, sprang up Stoic apathy, Epicurean self-contentment, and Skeptic imperturbability. But when these centuries had passed, when philosophy had taught people to suspect their own capacities and possibilities, and therefore how splendidly they themselves were worth saving, sad experience had also taught them that despite all their theories they were utterly unable themselves to do so. And thus the Greeks showed the world the certainty of truth and the need of a Saviour. Add to these facts another, that the Greeks gave the world the most beautiful, the most perfect language and literature known—a language capable of conveying the highest spiritual conceptions, and understood in every

city of the Roman world—and we gain a larger comprehension of the contribution of the Greeks to the conditions fitted to welcome the Christ.

This coming in the "fulness of time" meant that had Christ come at any other time He would have found the world unprepared to receive Him or His teachings. It meant that God suited His greatest revelation to the age and place most ready for the reception of salvation. In this there is nothing arbitrary, but rather a gracious recognition of human conditions.

And the same harmony is remarked when the manner of Christ's revelations is studied. No teaching could be more natural, more incidental and unarranged. "It was drawn forth by occasions as they arose. It shaped itself to the character, the words, the acts of those whom He met in the highway of the world. It borrowed its imagery from the circumstances and scenery of the moment." Though having far-extended application, it always had immediate reference to existing local needs and circumstances. There was most perfect adaptation to the mental and religious conditions of those whom he desired

to edify. He was God then as He is now, and always has been, teaching men concerning Himself after a manner never contrary to their innate constitution, but always naturally, in keeping with conditions, progressively from the lower to the higher, from the more restricted to the fuller comprehension and application.

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## PART IV.

### SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF PRO- GRESSIVE REVELATION.

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#### CHAPTER XV.

##### *THE MARRIAGE TIE. PRIVATE REVENGE.*

WE will follow the growth of the sanctity of the marriage tie. Before Moses, the Israelites held the same views regarding the position and rights of woman which were common to all their pagan neighbors. A wife was personal property. She was purchased, captured in war, or otherwise obtained. The husband might treat her as he might treat any other chattel. He was at liberty to exercise his most arbitrary pleasure or displeasure towards her—kill her, if he chose, sell her, renounce or divorce her at his discretion. Moses desired to lessen the injury thus possible to woman, and to protect the family life: but

finding himself unable entirely to over-rule the ancient practices, he laid restrictions upon the power of the husband so far as this: that a man could not repudiate his wife without first giving her a bill of divorce, in which were written the date, place, cause of repudiation, and permission to marry again when she pleased. It further enacted that the husband might again receive back the repudiated wife, provided that in the meantime she had not taken another husband (Deut. xxiv. 1-4.). Thus some limit was put to the husband's arbitrary prerogative, fuller recognition was given to woman's marital rights and protection to the home life. It was far from perfection, but it was a long step in that direction, as long a step as the state of society then existing would demand or permit.

The Mosaic divorce law received the endorsement of Jehovah. He allowed it because of the hardness of the people's hearts. The Saviour, however, gave it an unqualified repeal. The semi-civilization, law, and moral development, which were formerly its *raison d'être* can be no longer urged. He speaks forth the final word

upon divorce, declaring it never valid except in the one case, adultery, and forbade the guilty woman ever again to marry. Here is progress.

In the subject of private revenge we find another most interesting point from which to trace the progressive growth of a moral idea. Centralized governments of the modern type look upon crime as not simply against the individual person injured, but also against society, and to be punished by society. In the patriarchal or early tribal life no claim was more universally acknowledged and enforced than that of private revenge. The right to take satisfaction for the injury inflicted lay in the hands of the person or family injured. The modern Vendetta, which makes it the sacred duty of every relation of a Sicilian or Corsican family, even to its last surviving member, to give up his life, if need be, that an insult done to the family be avenged, is a well-preserved form of the ancient custom. The wandering tribes of Arabia are very faithful reproductions of what their ancestry was when Abraham and Lot were roaming these same desert sands. The following

incident is of double value to us, as it not only illustrates the law of private revenge in the tribal life, but bears directly upon the subject of Progressive Revelation in the Bible, for the Arab is first cousin to the Jew.

One evening when the author of "Kadish Barnea" was travelling in Arabia, he found himself encamped unpleasantly near the black tents of an Arab tribe. In the morning his dragoman, who was a chief, accompanied by most of his clan as assistants, visited the neighboring encampment and accused the chief of stealing a camel. The charge was acknowledged immediately. The chief claimed that he had a right to steal the animal, because a member of the tribe to which the camel belonged had once stolen a camel from him. It was but justice, he argued, that he should steal one in revenge. The claim was admitted. The camel, however, was finally returned, lest the great American traveller, as the dragoman described him, should make trouble through being delayed. It was agreed, though, that the chief should forego his right only for the time. He might steal another camel if an opportunity presented itself.

Moses found the problem of private revenge awaiting his solution. It was most pernicious in the case of murder. The duty of retribution lay upon the nearest relative of the slain person, who might take it either upon the real murderer or any of his immediate kin. These, in their turn, watched and hunted the opposite party until a family war of extermination might follow. The one way to avoid such a situation was the payment of blood-money as a compensation to the nearest relative of the murdered person. Moses undertook to lessen the evils arising out of this ancient custom by placing it under restrictions—not by abolishing it. The conception of a loving forgiveness was still far beyond even him. "Thine eye shall not pity," he said (Deut. xix. 21), "life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot." In fact this law of retaliation is an integral part of the Mosaic legislation. He, however, placed the right of private revenge under useful limitations: (1) The wilful murderer was to be put to death without the alternative of paying a money compensation. (2) The innocent slayer was permitted to find safe refuge in one of six cities of

refuge. (3) It was made illegal to take revenge on any but the person of the offender himself. (4) Judges were provided to arbitrate between slayer and avenger.

These provisions of the Mosaic law were as humane as the age demanded and permitted. They were still, however, far from perfection. The pure and final edict came with Jesus Christ, when He absolutely abrogated the old principle of private satisfaction, and instituted that of long-suffering, sacrifice, and forgiveness. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn unto him the other also.'" This new commandment does not disclaim the right of society to protect itself by the punishment of criminals, but it forever forbids the taking of private revenge for personal injury.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIVINE IDEA AND THE MESSIANIC IDEA.*

A STUDY which would most completely and exhaustively illustrate the principle of Progressive Revelation would be the study of the development in the Jewish conception of God. Indeed the Bible as the history of the moral and religious progress of the Hebrew people is but the history of the Progressive Self-Revelation of God. "In the records of this nation's life, in its privileges and its vicissitudes, its captivities and its restorations, its blessings and its chastenings, its seers and its lawgivers, in all the forces that combine to make up the great movements of national life, God is present all the while, shaping the ends of this nation, no matter how perversely it may rough hew them, till at last it stands on an elevation far above

the other nations, breathing a better atmosphere, thinking worthier and more spiritual thoughts, obeying a far purer moral law, and holding fast nobler ideal of righteousness." Every step in this unparalleled advancement from paganism to the first among nations, in things moral and spiritual, was the fruit of an ever-growing, constantly purifying idea of the nature of God.

The fathers and founders of the Israelitish nation stepped out from the ranks of the purely pagan when they declared for one God, and refused longer to bow to wooden images. Nevertheless their thoughts of Him were as yet most crude, and semi-pagan. It was long before they ceased to think of God as confined to the particular locality in which were living the chosen tribes, and still longer before they conceived Him as protecting and directing any other peoples than themselves. Jehovah was the God of the Jews. Like nations more heathen, they attributed to their God passions very human-like and not always of the highest. They more than once speak of Jehovah in terms

suggesting the irascible, the changeable, jealous of many attentions, and appeased and gratified by sacrifice. Far indeed the distance which the Israelitish mind must travel through experiences most varied and marvellous from these early feeble and imperfect conceptions of Jehovah to the ground upon which Samuel and Hosea stand when they declare obedience and mercy better than sacrifice. Still further is the distance to Jonah, who caught a glimpse of the universality of God's loving desire; to Job, to whom the inscrutable wisdom and awful majesty of Jehovah were made evident; or to Isaiah and Ezekiel, who bowed before the omnipotence, infinite wisdom and holiness of God. Through many centuries further continues the widening, ever more purified and ennobled conception of God, until in the fulness of time came Jesus Christ, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. In the Son, our Saviour, no longer do we shrink in fearful dread from a Divine Being, wrathful and vindictive, pouring out direst vengeance upon His enemies, or measuring even-handed

justice, devoid of mercy to His own people. He is a Father who loves the whole world, and so loves it that He gave His Son, His only-begotten, that He might save it. Nothing exalted, nothing majestic ever conceived in the past but is retained in higher and intensified form in our idea of the Divine One. Also into our thought of Him has been infused a tenderness, a gentleness, a yearning love which has robbed our mental picture of all its pre-christian, hard, steely brilliance, and flooded it with a soft radiance and a mellowed sweetness which reaches our hearts. "We love Him because He first loved us."

There is another fact most glorious in revelation to which only slight allusion need be made to adduce crowning evidence of the truth of our contention that revelation is progressive. I refer to the growth of the Messianic idea.

This golden strand running through all Old Testament prophecy, and giving it purpose and unity, appears first in the primeval promise given in the Edenic garden, and which throughout century after century, epoch after epoch,

gradually assumes definiteness, fulness, and glory. What student of the Bible but can quote the promises to Adam and Abraham containing the germ of universal benediction ? This germ, though cherished and precious to those receiving it, was to them shrouded by a vagueness, an imprecision so intense that concerning it nothing more could be predicted than that it was a blessing of some kind most gracious and universal. All the events recording the march of the after ages, and eliciting new and supplementary revelations, were necessary to intensify the shadowy hope of the Messiah, draw it from obscurity, and clothe it with flesh and character and mission.

Down through the dim vistas of the ages, the princely footsteps can ever be more clearly traced, the sound of His triumphant approach more distinctly heard. Into the misty distance of far antiquity stretches a line of men. At the farther end, in the mystery which shrouds them, stand the Abimelech and Melchisedec, while at the nearer end towers John the Baptist, who as the last scion of a giant race lays down his life

with his exhausted mission at the feet of Him for whose coming the race had lived to make preparation. Each in the long line holds in his hands a torch which not only casts some light upon his own age and need, but melts into the illumination which ever burns higher and brighter as the line advances.

Little by little the coming One emerges from the shadows. Gradually is the channel through which the anticipated blessing is to come limited to a race, then to a tribe, finally to a family. The prophetic mission is indicated by Moses, the kingly dignity by David; the sacrificial and priestly quality, while typified by many a rite and ceremony, is clearly pronounced by Isaiah. To the kingly anticipation of Israel in the glory of its monarchy is added the conception of a Deliverer when that glory had departed, and the people, groaning beneath the heel of foreign oppressors, were calling for a saviour. Not only did the kingdom of the expected king gradually take on spiritual characteristics, and the personal loveliness, patience, and glory of the king be more plainly delineated, but into such bright

light had the expectation of the ages emerged, that it was known that Bethlehem was to be His birthplace, Galilee His country, and a virgin His mother; that He was to preach glad tidings to the meek and bind up the broken-hearted; that though a king, He would come to the daughter of Zion riding on the foal of an ass; He was to be despised and rejected of men; was to be led like a lamb to the slaughter; His garments were to be parted, and lots cast for His vesture; His hands and feet were to be pierced; He was to have vinegar to drink; He was to pour out His soul unto death; was to be numbered with transgressors, and His grave, though intended to be with wicked men, was in reality destined to be with a rich man; His soul was not to left in hell, nor His flesh to suffer corruption; He was to sit on the right hand of Jehovah till His foes were made His footstool; His kingdom was to spread until ultimately the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven should be given to the saints of the Most High.

This sketch of the Messianic idea, which, like

the lamps that mark the outline of a great city but leave much to personal visitation, is sufficient to indicate the fidelity with which the Messianic conception, the greatest which ever loomed upon the horizon of human consciousness, has complied with the rule of progressiveness.

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## PART V.

### SOME DEDUCTIONS FROM OUR THEORY.

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#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### *THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE BE- COMES MORE EVIDENT.*

WE believe that God has been revealing Himself through mediums which are human, and that this revelation so imparted is now possessed by us in its purest, fullest collected form in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is both human and divine, even as Christ was human and divine. It contains elements that are of men and elements that are of God.

We believe, too, that the formation of the Bible was not the result of a happy chance, is not an accretion of fortuitous and broken parts, but was devised, controlled, and closed under divine wisdom and guidance. It has a purpose—a pur-

pose distinct and foreseen by the Deity before a single word was spoken or written. Every succeeding book of each succeeding age contributed in some manner to the evolvement of this purpose, so that running through our heaven-bestowed and heaven-directed library there is a golden thread, a sustained purpose, which binds it together as one whole.

This golden thread, ever enlarging, ever adding brighter lustre until it breaks into flashing coruscations in the time of Jesus, is conveyed in human elements, but these are subsidiary, secondary, only vehicles, the earthen pitchers containing and carrying the pure water. This thread, running through poetry and prose, through science, history, and philosophy, through prophecy and song, is the self-revelation of God, a revelation which culminates in Christ, its highest and fullest manifestation. This revelation is given to a race morally and religiously fallen and incapable of self-restoration. In a word, the purpose of the Bible is redemption, the salvation of humanity from sin in its power and results.

The spokesman for God, in delivering the message fitted to the age, will employ such language as will best convey his thought to his people, make reference to matters political, scientific, philosophic, historic, or literary, in terms in keeping with the intellectual progress of himself and people; but never must the mistake be made that these references had higher or other purpose than to be mediums, vehicles of a spiritual truth. They will be human, and may partake of the defective conceptions of the time or author. The purpose of the Bible is to teach morality and religion, and these alone. This is the divine element. Once for all this truth should take full possession of our habitual thought.

The Bible is not a text-book on religion and morality in the ordinary sense of a text-book. It is rather a record of a people, its institutions, and of the prominent personages among that people, through whom gradually nobler and fuller ideas of morality and religion were educated. Not in the abstract, but in the concrete, do we find theology and ethics taught in

the Bible. We find them lived out in the lives of statesmen and prophets, typified in sacred ceremony, illustrated in biography, moving the deep passions of the poet, formulated into maxims by the wise, and embodied in scientific and dramatic narrative.

Moral and religious truth are to the Bible what life is to the body. Life requires a body in which to exist and express itself, but the body is not the life. They are distinct and not to be confused, and he who undertakes the dissection must handle his scalpel with extreme care, else it may be found, as many a theological anatominist has found, that the life, the essential thing has escaped, and naught remains but bones, dead and dry.

It is to be noted, and never forgotten, that in every case where a writer lays claim to divine authority for his teachings, his claim applies only to religion and morality. Never once in the Holy Book is a claim made for infallibility in science or history. And I am tempted here to query—why should *we*?

Keeping in mind the real purpose of the Bible,

and that this purpose is carried onward in an element always human, and often, therefore, defective, will do much to repulse the persistent attacks made upon the divine Word by enemies who find, or profess to find, errors in it. Keeping in mind the real purpose of the Bible will do much to liberate those who are still dominated by the ancient doctrine that the Bible has no human element and therefore must be absolutely infallible, absolutely perfect in every part, word, allusion, relating no matter to what. Under this old cast-iron theory of inspiration, every reference to history and science, no matter how incidental, must be regarded as infallibly correct. Now, suppose a believer in this theory should in his historic researches among extra-Biblical sources discover what seemed to him an insuperable proof of a deviation, however slight, in the Bible, from a true date, number, or historic fact; or suppose in the comparison of one part of the Bible with another part he finds an inconsistency which he cannot harmonize; or suppose that modern scientific discovery stands out in bold denial of some ancient scientific view

incorporated in the Bible, what must that believer do? Sorry may be his dilemma, and many there be among earnest, reverent Bible students who to-day are in the dilemma. Well, if he still maintains unquestioned his faith in his ancient theory in face of these facts—and strangely enough this is how most of us are constituted—either he must stand by the Bible as he views it, defend it *in toto* against every historic and scientific advance, no matter how well these may be supported, shut his eyes to every Biblical inconsistency, however evident; or, on the other hand, he may throw his Bible *in toto* by the board, affirming that a proved error or incongruity in one part vitiates the whole, and thus he becomes infidel. There is no middle path to him who elects to retain the theory of mechanical and verbal inspiration, eliminating all human elements. He becomes a bigot or a sceptic.

The first alternative was accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, and their doctrine of infallibility in the Church still binds them to their ancient position, struggle however they

may. It was not surprising, therefore, that the monk Capernicus was for a long time afraid to advance his theory that it is the earth, not the sun, moon, and stars, as the Bible seems to teach, which turns around once in twenty-four hours. It was perfectly consistent to force Galileo to recant his statement that the earth moves and then imprison him for the rest of his life lest he should tell any one that he did not believe his own recantation. It was a kindness to Christianity to burn Bruno at the stake because he would not renounce his heretical faith in Capernicus and Galileo. When Des Cartes, the founder of modern philosophy, published a view of the universe at variance with Biblical conceptions, he was thoughtful enough to flee to Holland to avoid unpleasant complications.

The other alternative, which leaps into atheism or unbelief, has often seemed the only road open to the honest student who, under the domination of the old theory of inspiration and unable to reconcile certain facts stark and staring in his Bible with the logical demands of

his theory, has abandoned, not his theory, but his Bible. His mistake to us is apparent, but, poor fellow, he does not see it. If some true friend would take him by the hand and say, "Let me lead you out of your quandary. You cannot, constituted as you are, be a blinded bigot, you do not want to be a sceptic. Here is the key to your problem. *Change your theory of inspiration.* The Bible is all right. It is you that is wrong. Fit your theory to the facts. Do not distort or deny facts because they will not fit your theory. *Change your theory.*"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *BIBLICAL INACCURACIES PERTAIN TO THE HUMAN ELEMENT.*

IF an error, inaccuracy, inconsistency should be found in the Bible, it must not for a moment affect our faith in the Word of God. The error belongs to the human element, not to the divine.

No book in the sacred library is inspired more than its author was inspired. It is the work of a God-inspired man, but inspired only in matters of moral and spiritual truth. "The promises of our Lord guarantee inspiration only in respect to more and more apprehending the truth pre-eminent, the truth which is the essence of Christianity, and upon which the Church of Christ is founded. That the apostles would be made infallible in all details of history, in their judgments, in their policy or anticipations of the future fate of the Church, is nowhere so

much as hinted at; it certainly is by no means guaranteed or fairly to be inferred." (Ladd.) And what cannot well be averred of the apostles in the zenith of the pentecostal effulgence, cannot well be averred of their prophetic predecessors, all of whom might say: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost."

Every writer is subject to the limitations of culture and knowledge peculiar to the age in which he lives. Doubtless, too, every Biblical writer was selected by Deity because of his superior intellectual acumen. This at least was one qualification. Doubtless, also, all his natural faculties and intuitions were clarified and intensified by his more perfect co-operation with the Spirit Divine, so that, standing like Saul above his fellows, his declarations were often received by them because they knew the man. Witness the speeches of prophets major and minor, afterwards reduced to writing. But all this admitted, it remains that each man belonged to his own age, and was affected by its prevailing spirit. His literary methods, his science, his

history and philosophy, were usually part of the common possession. And whatever of crudeness or infirmity belonged to these will appear to some extent in his writings.

Now, shall we repudiate any writer because he did not know everything? A pilot was asked, as he guided his vessel into a difficult harbor, if he knew where all the rocks and sand-bars were. "No," was his reply, "but I know where the deep water is." Was that enough? Would you demand that he know the flora and fauna along the shores? Or, suppose he could not give a beautiful interpretation of Browning, or translate into easy terms the meaning of Emerson's "Over-soul," would you refuse to let him guide the vessel into the harbor? One thing he knew, one thing his mission, one thing he did well. Was it not enough?

So, too, Biblical writers do not know all things, or profess to know. The Bible does not teach science, history, or philosophy, or art, or literature, though these are all there in a profusion and beauty and truth found in no other literary collection. But it does claim to teach

some things. It does teach that there is one God, and one only, as infinitely loving as He is infinitely holy, wise, and powerful. It does teach that all men are sinners unable to save themselves, and hence need a Saviour. It does teach that ever through the long and hazy ages of misconception a brighter light was penetrating, until it broke into fulness when the Messiah, the perfect God, the perfect Man, was seen of men. It does teach that through faith, and knowledge of this Divine Man, and through co-operation with Him, the defaced image of God in humanity may not only be restored, but so glorified that it becomes fitted for communion with the Great Father throughout the ages eternal. Is all this worth having? Shall this good news, this good will to men, be cast away because somewhere a human recorder may have misplaced a date, enlarged a number? No! Here is the living water of God; perish we must if we have it not! We shall drink, drink from the wells of salvation, even though at times the healing stream be carried to us in human pitchers, earthen, crude, and misshapen.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *CHRIST'S TEACHINGS THE STANDARD.*

THE earlier teachings of the Bible are to be tested by the Saviour's, and any portions which fall below this standard we may consider partial, and are binding upon us only to the extent to which they harmonize in spirit with the life and words of our Lord.

This axiom growing out of the doctrine of progressive revelation has been well illustrated by Professor George Fisher, of Yale: "A father corresponds with an absent son from his childhood. The earliest of these letters will naturally contain injunctions and counsels adapted to the situation, needs, and temptations peculiar to a boy. He is exhorted, perhaps, to set apart definite hours for prayer, and a particular time for writing his letters. He is enjoined to retire to bed at nine o'clock in the evening. Particular

regulations are laid down relative to his clothing and expenses. The letters for a number of years are composed largely of rules of behaviour affectionately but imperatively urged, and interspersed with that sort of instruction in morals and religion which would be easily apprehended by an immature mind. At length the son arrives at the stage of manhood, and shows the moulding agency of this continued guidance. Then the father addresses him as a full-grown man, and communicates to him in one final composition the principles pertaining to life, duty, and man's destiny which he deems of highest importance. The son collects all these letters into a volume. They all discover in different degrees his father's character, and throw light upon the path of his duty. But he would be a simpleton if he referred to the earliest and latest letters without discrimination, and confounded the injunctions given to the schoolboy with the truths of that final letter. Rather would he test everything previous by the contents of this final communication "

The son in this illustration is the Jewish

nation passing through all degrees of moral and religious growth from Abraham to Jesus Christ. The Bible is the biography of that national life and contains the records of God's teachings adapted at every point to its moral and religious development. In the childhood of the nation abstract principles and general rules are not suitable, because the people cannot be safely left to guide themselves by applying these general principles to practical and daily conduct. So God speaks to them with a definite command, Thou shalt not do this, Thou shalt do that, and definite rewards and punishments are attached. Such was the character of revelation during the time of the patriarchs and of Moses.

When the prophets arose, we observe them looking under the particular injunction or concrete restriction for the broader, underlying principles which gave the injunction validity. "They place less emphasis upon the innumerable minute exactments for ritual and ecclesiastical life, and exalt a relatively few principles of veracity, justice, mercy, piety, and faith."

The teachings of Jesus Christ are the culmin-

ation of the Father's revelation to the matured Jewish people. This revelation is now altogether that of principle, not of definite concrete injunction. The Jews are now supposed to be able to apply these abstract laws to their daily life. Few indeed are the number of these laws, for in the broad, comprehensive grasp of the Saviour they have been expressed in a comparatively small number of distinct but pregnant statements and maxims. In truth, on one occasion He summarized them all in the principle calling for love supreme to God and love impartial to our neighbor. All teachings before Christ require comparison with the standards forever established by Him. Some of these pre-Christian teachings and laws were partial and imperfect, as fitted to a growing child. Some were specifically condemned by Jesus, and others He declared defective. All contained some truth, but few were final and perfect when tested with the touchstone of Christ's words. His are the only infallibly true, never-to-be-amended words of revelation. He alone is the 'light of life,' without spot or shadow. Believ-

ing this, for us it will not be difficult to find an answer to the query so beautifully put by Lyman Abbott in his "Evolution of Christianity," "Is the Bible like a northern light flashing instantly and without premonition upon the world of darkness and setting all the heavens aglow with its resplendent fire; or is it like a sunrise, silvering first the mountain tops, gradually creeping down the valleys, a progressive light, mingled, yet gradually vanquishing the darkness, its pathway like that of the righteous man, growing brighter and brighter until the perfect day?"

## CHAPTER XX.

### *CONCLUSION—AUTHOR'S TESTIMONY.*

I HOPE my words may do for my readers what my study and thinking have done for myself—revealed the *via media*, the middle way, which carries safely past rank, uncritical bigotry on the one side, and brutal scepticism on the other. It has given me anew the Holy Book. I listen with reverence and gladness to him who, holding the Bible to his heart, declares it to be the very Word of God. I understand him. I can listen sympathetically, hopefully, to the student whose honest inquiry has led him into a labyrinth of trouble and darksome doubt. I know well that a pathway may be found which will lead to peace and faith, a path winding, mayhap, but which leads eventually to a cross from which, gazing at him tenderly, the face of Jesus Christ our Elder Brother shall bend,

dropping into his open soul love, joy, peace, and righteousness in the Holy Ghost.

I have learned that he who mines the sacred Word and would so search that the golden veins of precious truth shall be uncovered and transferred to the treasure-room of his own soul, must bend to his work in simple faith, holy, hopeful expectancy, yet with wise discernment. With the golden nuggets here and there may be thrown up a stone or a root, but the earnest miner cares not for these. Let the destructive critic make a museum, if he will, of these useless stones and rotted roots. As for the true student, he seeks truth, such truth as he at the time may need; and He who has laid the hidden streams for the thirsty, and brings around the abundant harvest for the hungry, shall see to it that no child of His, crying, searching for the water of life and the bread come down from heaven, but shall find them.